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Allensworth Exhibit: 100 Years of the California Dream Opens at the Capitol

Sacramento CA--The Centennial Celebration of Allensworth, one of the first towns founded, financed and governed by African Americans, will kick off with the unveiling of a historic exhibit that will be on display in the State Capitol Museum rooms from February 5 – March 31, 2008. A reception will be held from 6 – 8 p.m. in the basement of the Capitol on February 6.

The 22-panel exhibit, "Allensworth 100 Years of the California Dream," is the result of collaboration by the California African American Museum, California State Parks, and the California Black Legislative Caucus."

"The vision for Allensworth was a thriving municipality where African Americans functioned independently from, yet cooperatively with, the wider society to achieve self-respect, self-sufficiency, self-determination and prosperity. We still share much of his vision today as we work toward a greater realization of the California Dream," said Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas, (D-Los Angeles) Chair of the Legislative Black Caucus, who spearheaded the development of the exhibit.

The town of Allensworth, located in Tulare County, California was a visionary settlement established and operated by African Americans in 1908. It was founded by Colonel Allen Allensworth, Professor William Payne and three other enterprising African American men, and developed as a showplace for civic engagement, culture and ideas.

The settlement thrived economically based on retail trade, its level farmlands, county roads, and the Union Pacific rail line. Community life was vibrant with churches, schools, a library, general store, theater, symphony orchestra and numerous civic organizations.

Allensworth began its decline in 1914 when the Santa Fe railroad moved its stop from Allensworth to the nearby town of Alpaugh. Col. Allensworth's death, that year, a drought, poor crops and a failing water supply became hopeless obstacles.

Despite its slow decline over the decades of the 20th century, Allensworth became "the town that refused to die." In the 1970s the State of California, recognizing the historical significance of Allensworth, purchased 240 acres of the original town and surroundings, establishing the Col. Allensworth State Historic Park.

"As the caretakers of Col. Allensworth State Historic Park, we are very pleased to be working in partnership with Senator Ridley-Thomas, the Black Caucus and the California African American Museum to tell the important story of Allensworth's impact on California history and culture. This past year the future of Allensworth was threatened. Today, it is a pleasure to look forward to this centennial, knowing Allensworth is protected and to dream of the possibilities before us," said California State Parks Director Ruth Coleman.

"Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Allensworth represents a significant moment in time and the California African American Museum is thrilled to have had the opportunity to organize an exhibition about this community. Our mission is to research, preserve and interpret the history, as well as the art and culture, of African Americans, with a special emphasis on Californian and Western history. It is particularly fitting, then, that through this exhibition the history and lessons of Allensworth are never forgotten," said Charmaine Jefferson, executive director, California African American Museum.

Curator Susan Anderson states, "For the first time, the exhibit highlights the impact Allensworth had across California and its many diverse communities. From controversial legislation, to innovative education pioneers, to the role of Buffalo Soldiers in California's development, this exhibit widens our understanding of Allensworth's influence, and how it resonates today.

"Allensworth: 100 Years of the California Dream" will tour California throughout 2008 – 2009 at sites in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, the Bay Area and San Diego. #####